

[Speech given in the Havana Convention Centre by the president of the Republic of Cuba, Fidel Castro Ruz, at the graduation ceremony for 9th grade pioneers from the José Martí Experimental Junior Secondary School. 23 July 2005 \[1\]](#)

Date:

23/07/2005

Dear graduating students;

Parents and relatives;

Teachers

Most honourable collective who have made what we are celebrating today possible.

As everybody already knows, 345 pioneers who were in the 7th grade on 6 September 2002 when the José Martí Experimental Junior Secondary School was inaugurated are graduating.

They are the first to finish ninth grade in this school, educated using the new conception of a general, all round teacher who works with 15 adolescents, accompanies them from 7th to 9th grade and who has been friend, counsellor and guide of each one of them.

This general, all round teacher has studied and worked systematically with the parents — I'm trying to see where the parents are, up there, over there as well. (He points). A special hello and congratulations to them (Applause)— I ask for their cooperation just as we asked for it that night in the Payret cinema/theatre where we had to take refuge, if I remember rightly, because a heavy downpour was on its way, it was raining then and now it's raining again.

When we chose this school we had already beaten the challenge of the first experiment in the Cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin EJSS where the teaching was done by the first general all-round teachers: the Brave. We needed to extend the experiment to an urban day school which did its teaching in one of the most complex situations in the capital, the easiest situation was not chosen. This was in the midst of the first ardent, creative years of the Battle of Ideas.

The reflection which lead the Revolution to make a special effort for seventh, eighth and ninth grade, which in Cuba we call basic secondary education, are contained in the following words which I had the opportunity to use back then and which, in my opinion, still hold true today in a world context.

“Basic secondary education is a disaster, a generalised opinion to which even international agencies that work in the educational field subscribe”.

It was a traditional education system inherited from the West and created for elite minorities”.

I should like to know how many of you belong to elite minorities or which of the parents do. We know quite well that it is just the opposite.

“Under the current system — I said back then— “which entails a teacher who specialises in one subject attending to many groups whose numbers can reach hundreds of student” — this was pointed out by Mara when she said that she was responsible for more than 200 — “no one has any particular responsibility, does not know, nor could know each child, his or her general behaviour, his or her character, temperament, personal problems, difficulties at home.

“A student passed through the hands of 11, 12, even 13 teachers depending on the grade, and it was difficult to know the name of all of the students and we wondered if it was really possible to read and analyse in depth the exams or the work handed in by more than 200 adolescents”.

It was a method that had nothing to do with education, a rudimentary, inefficient method difficult to teach with — the teachers, of course, being in no way to blame, they had inherited this from the last two centuries— a method where nobody harmonised his or her knowledge, culture, values. There’s no doubt, it was not the ideal way to educate a 12 year adolescent, like the ones we graduated two days ago in Cárdenas, I remember; children who are just entering adolescence, who are entering that stage which is decisive and irreversible for their personalities and for their lives. We are talking about human beings, not about machines, not about automatons and not about people called irrational, from some other species.

And on top of all that, in our country specifically, especially in the capital, there was a shortage of teachers for many subjects, a nerve-racking search for help from university students to teach one or several hours of classes a week, the use of students from the teacher training institutes, the call to professionals for volunteers, the changes in or arrangements of timetables which had to be constructed around the teacher shortage. Schools found themselves obliged to draw up timetables that were far from ideal in order to deal with the specialist teacher shortage. Did any of you ever think about that?

In Havana specifically, when the details of this kind of education were analysed, we found that the number of classrooms was considerably below the number of student groups at this level. The morning and afternoon (double) sitting was not functioning nor could it function; not all students came back in the afternoon; they were learning approximately 20 to 25% of the subject matter for a given grade.

The difficulties were mostly centred here in this city and because of that we, in the middle of special period and the blockade, set out to try to fix the state of basic secondary education. We said that then, when everything was still to be seen.

What has been the result of the three years since this experiment began? The main efficiency indicators provided us with these data: 98.2% attendance, 98.5% punctuality, 90.8% efficiency in secondary education...

Of 380 students who started seventh grade, only 35 did not finish their secondary education at José Martí; 27 of these did so in other secondary schools because their families moved to other provinces, or in trade or correctional schools in Havana and 8 students emigrated with their families.

The school’s main achievements include the consolidation of the teaching staff, the integration of all of the school’s organisations and the links established with the families.

School organisation made an impressive about-turn, today it is a school that has strict discipline — you can see it, feel it, breathe it— and it is very pleasant that this is accompanied by — and I have seen this— a thorough formal education in manners which was not seen anywhere else and I don’t know if it has ever been seen in our country. It’s a pleasure to see the polite way in which they address other people, in which they speak, express themselves. I have not seen another school like it and I hope that one day, not too far off, all schools will be like this.

The student’s opinions are listened to in this school, the strategic concept of micro-university is being

put into practice, the healthy tradition of national or patriotic anthems and songs has been reinstated or created, sometimes both, here work is done systematically to develop in the students an all-round familiarity with political affairs, in order to overcome that worst, most awful thing, ignorance about these matters which are so decisive for the life of societies and the world; current national and international topics too, without which we would be like blind people wandering through the world without even a walking stick: history, art, economic and science topics. If we have no knowledge of these subjects we will not know anything about anything.

Work with the families is enhanced by the teachers' visits to the family home and by holding parent-teacher meetings that have become veritable schools for family education and these are reinforced with individual contact when the situation so requires.

There can be no other way of working as a teacher, of cooperating, and reaching the sacred and elevated goals of school and of education.

The José Martí Pioneers Organisation has taken on new and more efficient kinds of work.

This has meant students are playing a more central role; becoming self-directed, thoroughgoing analyses are made at student assemblies which improves their quality and results in the necessary level of criticism and self-criticism.

The use of videoclasses, teleclasses and the educational software which the education system has and the role of the educator, the general, all-round teacher have played a key part in training teachers, as has the methodological work for each grade in order to meet the strategic objective of these transformations and to increase the student's store of knowledge.

In this school no shift is wasted.

Academic performance [of the students] has been as follows: in a very important subject like mathematics results have gone from 29.2% correct answers in October 2002, when the school was first tested, to 69.1% in an inspection done this past May. Two students were winners in a countrywide mathematics competition.

In Spanish from 59% of correct answers in October 2002 when the school was first tested — things weren't as bad as in mathematics— to 69% in the inspection in May 2005.

In the fifth inspection, the results of the José Martí experimental school were better than the national average by 20.42 percentage points in mathematics and by 4.83 percentage points in Spanish.

The results confirm the validity of the new educational model based on the concept of a general, all-round teacher and more individualised treatment for students and their families, in spite of the fact that it is something completely new and there is no previous experience [to go on].

Some opinions from parents of students graduating today:

"Our children have changed the way they think and act".

"Our children have been given better vocational guidance".

"Our children's discipline has improved".

"They have gained maturity and responsibility about the decisions they take".

"We are amazed at how our children have changed their behaviour at home and their tastes".

"They are interested in studying and in what they are going to do in the future".

"My son surprised me when he decided to become a teacher".

"Mi son's starting in this experiment is the best thing that has happened to me".

"My son grew a lot as a human being. Now he is more concerned about others".

"Today my son is thinking of going on with his education; before all he could think of was finishing ninth grade".

"Our children's teachers have had a good influence on the decisions they take".

"We are grateful for the way the school has headed in these three years"

"We have seen positive changes both in learning and in educational things".

"This experiment has brought about more communication between school and home".

"We think that our children have become better educated through this experiment".

"Today my son does his homework responsibly".

"As a mother, I felt proud that my son was given his Union of Young Communists membership card".

The satisfaction, pride is really noticeable.

We had heard people talk about it, but we understand it much better this afternoon, at this ceremony and with all of you assembled here, parents, teachers and students.

In September 2003, just two years ago, these transformations in basic secondary schools were extended to the whole country, they being a radical, profound conception of an educational, training model.

It was a bold step based on the experiences we had been observing in the experimental school and we decided not to wait any longer nor even to draw up a three year programme in order to do it. We judged that it was something that was needed. Now, of course, they are several thousand young people studying in the Salvador Allende school and in other teacher-training schools across the country training to be all-round teachers.

We didn't have a lot of human resources. Not all teachers at this level and other levels were convinced. I would say that not even half, possibly far fewer than a third.

Havana, the home of educational disasters, didn't even have enough teachers, and far from enough eleventh and twelfth grade students to go to the schools where the all-round teachers would be trained.

This was the name they were given, just as those for primary schools were called emergency teachers and everyone was amazed and thinking: "And what will these people do"? What the devil will happen to secondary and primary education"?

In 2002 —I think it was in September, more or less around that time— we had discovered that we were running out of teachers in Havana; the average age of teachers was going up, many were reaching retirement age but thanks to their stoicism and their spirit of sacrifice they were still teaching, some in those primary schools which were another disaster area, since they had suffered the slings and arrows of more than 10 years of special period. Some were lacking a window here and there and which school

wasn't stained, and don't mention the toilets, the running water, the kitchen, etcetera, etcetera, et-very-cetera. I said that because I saw many of them and we were dismayed.

We also took the brave decision — it was brave— not only to train emergency teachers — it was inevitable— and to start a programme— and this is why I think it was in 2000— to carry out major repairs on 769 primary and secondary schools in the city, in two years.

The whole population threw themselves into the job, as can only be done in a revolution, working who knows how many hours night and day. I think that our country has never made such an effort in such a short time and with far fewer resources than today. And it had been said that they had to be ready by September of that year; it was a commitment and commitments must be met.

Everybody worked really hard, the Party worked really hard, young people, grass-roots organisations, agencies. What happened is everybody committed themselves to, fell in love with this task, which was not that difficult because it was fixing schools for children.

If the housing situation was difficult and if there were all kinds of problems, at least those children would have schools with no stains, with light bulbs, with windows, with running water, with toilets, with kitchens that worked, with refrigeration, with food that although it might not be the best was improved with bigger amounts of some things like the amount of grains, which doubled and other things. It was a huge effort and our commitments were met to the letter.

There was more than a little anxiety waiting for the time —sometimes it was raining hard— when there were scarcely three weeks left; sometimes a roof that had a problem in a support and it seemed impossible to solve the problem.

The last school I think it was the 400th was opened towards the end of May and there were still the rest to do, more than 360 and some were new; they had to be built. They were just over two months left. Around 45,000 builders and residents were working every day.

It was really an amazing feat, surrounded by that disgusting blockade and special period bequeathed to us by other people's mistakes, to put it as politely as possible. We were struggling, holding our own all alone at a time when some believed, at the beginning of that stage, that it was only a matter of days before the news rang out that the Cuban Revolution has gone under. But what the Cuban revolution did was to go upwards, although some silly fools don't understand that and those idiots to the north of us understand it even less because hate and bitter disappointments make them more and more stupid because they have not been able to cow this people; dedicating themselves to buying a handful of nobodies, mercenaries, who speak nonsense and even defend the blockade. There are things to say about that when appropriate.

Now we can't waste a minute: if there is a hurricane, we have to face up to that danger, and if it's a different threat, well to that too; if there is a crisis with electricity, the result of the wrong ideas of people who were supposed to know who had, in their turn, copied other countries — almost all other countries— who were supposed to know what they were doing, this stemming from the period when a barrel of oil cost twenty times less; they hadn't taken notice of the new things that were going on in the world.

Yes, but conceptual errors which were immediately attacked the minute they were discovered. I am not going to say any more, let's wait.

This is another topic for another time, but I want to tell you that we know what we are doing and it's not just a few things. Now let's see what the blabber mouths the ignorant and the fools say.

I am not calling those who are suffering fools, I am not giving the name fools to those who are suffering from the consequences of some of these shortages which are increasing in the world because in modern

society what didn't exist before, what was previously solved with whale blubber candles — and the whales are running out too— or candles made of some other kind of grease or with lanterns like those the literacy campaign workers took to the mountains where not even by chance would you see a little village with a lights or a house with electric light.

Today this energy and this system is vital in a modern society and in a society that has brought this service to more than 90% of the population, when really, there was no service for 50% of the population on 1 January 1959 when the revolution triumphed and household consumption was just a few little drops of electricity. Today it is vital, and even more when hurricane like these arrive, but we have time to go into the subject in depth, and not just once but more than once and to also talk about what those barbarians, those savages, those mass murderers did, the ones who invade nations to gain control over the energy it will now be their turn to listen to the home truths they need to hear. I only mention what we have done to remind you that there is nothing that this revolutionary people cannot, no matter what the conditions. (Applause)

I spoke of what was done in Havana, but the work continues in the rest of the country and the works of the Battle of Ideas are continuing, they are becoming stronger every day and every day there are more primary, secondary, technical schools in the rest of the country undergoing major repairs although the schools in the rest of the country, even those with a lot of problems were not in a situation anywhere like those in Havana. And not just that, everything is organised so that this situation does not arise again and although sometime people trip over the same tree trunk three times we hope that the number of trippings-over grows ever less.

I am giving you're a preview of some of the things that you are going to learn in life, which you are already learning, and which you arrive at — I am referring to the life that lies ahead of you— with an incomparably better education than the one we found on the day of our triumph or that which was being learnt over dozens of years, and quite a few things have been learnt, quite a few thousand, almost a million university graduates, but that is nothing compared to those we will have in the future, not even a distant future in terms of trained intelligence which is the bearer not only of a long and heroic tradition but also of very great knowledge.

As I was saying, we could not be patient enough to wait to act in secondary education which was worse, really much, much worse than primary. I reminded you of that time when we began the experiment, or when we decided to carry it out not just in the capital. Reflect and you will see how much effort [was rewired]: teachers for not more than 20 students in primary and no more than 15 in secondary; and to do that they had to be all-round teachers.

All people should have this all-roundness as the norm, because, well as the teacher said so very honestly: "I didn't think it was possible". But, for example, I don't think it is possible that each one of you speaks at home every day and all the time about the same thing, you talk about one thing in the morning, about something else at noon, something else in the afternoon, and about yet another thing at the evening meal or at night.

Life can't be reduced to just one thing; knowledge must not be reduced to just one sphere. How I regret that it wasn't my fate to go to a school that the one The Brave went to or that school from which students graduated with the degree of embryo general, all-round teachers to be what they almost are I think that they are finishing a higher degree.

I have seen some of them around here, I know them and I remember them very well. Look at all these things, Brave ones, teachers who have been carrying out your noble mission for many years, new graduates, a number that grows and grows. How far? To infinity.

We must all try to be general, all-round teachers. Imagine yourselves in the place of any one of us having to know about everything without knowing anything, having to talk about everything before we graduate as general, all-round teachers, which we will never be.

We had to study law, almost, almost without knowing why we were studying law. As I have said before, some people used to say: "This young man is going to be a lawyer, he talks a lot". And I sort of wonder what young man doesn't talk a lot, and more and more.

They are quite a few of those who are graduating here who want to be lawyers, well, I congratulate them. Other told me they want to be doctors. I replied: What mission do you want us to send you on?" And so on, very interesting, just like what happened to me in Cárdenas but now in a more concrete way and with adolescent students and now with almost more than adolescents, young people who only three years ago were the same age as Elián and his friends. Look at how the years fly by, how time goes by.

Today, and thanks to audaciousness, the whole country, all the secondary school in the country are working under this education system. For that reason and only two years ago these transformations in basic secondary schools were extended to the whole country, they being a radical, profound conception within an educational and training model. This would not have been possible without the help of the 30,758 teachers who work at this level, 26, 328 of whom took steps to turn themselves into general, all-round teachers.

And these teachers were being joined by the force of 12,553 general, all-round teachers trained in the emergency courses. The next school year will begin with 4,980 new general, all-round teachers who have recently graduated which means that in the last four years of the Battle of Ideas 18,533 emergency general, all-round teachers have been trained for basic secondary schools.

I remember that 19,324 29" televisions sets have been installed. The decision was made in July. We wanted to start in September, we had Pandas (TN. A Chinese brand of television sets) but Pandas are smaller, For various reasons, your very classrooms, which are in a building which has big and small spaces, some had to be divided, other couldn't be divided because this wonderful school is a part of our National Heritage —today it is wonderful not just from an historical and architectural point of view but rather because it is the school from which you are graduating, the outcome of the first experiment in the history of a system of this kind. It is a pity that the sceptics couldn't peer through a crack and see everything that we are seeing here today.

Moreover, those 29" television sets on which things look better had to be bought, we just about had to fly them in so that they would be here by September, But even before a lot of work was done with a select group of teachers and students who spent their summer preparing classes.

Also, on the other hand, machines that can copy video tapes were installed and since there were more than 2000 classes it seemed like that task would never end.

The televisions arrived and the cassettes were made and the programmes and those class rooms that had to be repaired were repaired all over the country, almost all of them, So we could get started and not waste one nor two not three years.

That is how the school year we are talking about began two years ago and which now has the labour force it needs, the resources it needs and the experience it need, that's the most important.

We also had the 21" televisions, 1018 and about 15,989 videocassettes.

2,240 classes were taped for mathematics, Spanish, history and English for all three grades and physics for eighth and ninth grade, the classes were given by prestigious teachers and 250 students from Havana.

Educational television a programme that was also created in the battle of Ideas, of which we now have three channels and we can have as many as we want, that all we need to say, national, provincial and even municipal ones. Get ready, teachers you are going to have your own TV stations in the country's

municipalities! You will see, with all these resources that we didn't have, and nothing like it, when we began.

Educational television broadcasts 21 programmes every week that cover the contents of the subjects and the student's general education. In addition, there classes in mathematics and Spanish, two fundamental subjects are given more frequently in all grades and history is in ninth grade.

We have 13,590 computers which means we have a ratio of one computer to every 40 pioneers and in Havana it is one for every 25. We shall have more in the future, here and there and one day all schools will have the same amount, those that need them

I could tell you, being indiscreet, that there is a programme to buy 100,000 computers a year. Let's see what happens.

At the secondary level, we have the "navigator" programme which has 10 educational soft ware packages and 29 complementary software packages.

We have managed to have just one sitting in all the schools at this level, — just one sitting means a double sitting and it seems wrong but that is what it is called; let each person call it by the name he or she prefers— which begins at 7:30 in the morning and end at 4:30 in the afternoon.

With this in mind schools were built, divided or converted giving us 1545 new classrooms and 2,281 converted classrooms.

50,000 school desks and 100,000 chairs were allocated.

Of the 474,365 student at the basic secondary level 469,093, that is 98.88% of the total enrolment at this level are provided with free food in their schools, through the school snacks for day schools programme.

Don't think it was easy, dear comrades, this snack programme, the investment requires all over the country for that 100 gram bread roll, which emerged, do you know when? When we had that 769 schools plan, in the early hours of the morning, this little, soft, special flour bread toll, sometimes good, other times not so good... It was a matter of the staff who made them, of the equipment they had, of discipline and also of other things, and the soy yoghurt, which I won't talk about today, but it turns out to be — I receive new information about it every day— a really excellent food source. What could we do? There were hundreds of thousands of students, tens of thousands of teachers and a large number of other people who work in schools. I want you to know that millions and millions of dollars are invested in these snacks.

All of this was going on at the same time as the television sets were being bought and the other things, the computers, the repairs, and the furniture; "find the resources, save", demanding discipline. Let's see how things start improving.

Yesterday we were watching TV, the Round table, where they were talking about the state of the bakeries. They have improved —they had to improve. We know how many calories, how much protein the snack has. Of course I know all the stories off by heart, which flavour people like best, strawberry or banana, or caramel. By heart, I assure you comrades, we even know how much each item costs and how it's made, because this is one of the areas where you need to be all-round. Suppose someone suddenly says: we have to give them a snack and suppose you don't know what snack they are talking about and you don't know how much each thing costs, each input, and how much powdered milk is needed and how many tons of texturised soya, it would be the end and especially seeing as how much the kids like it. And as well, you know what you know that there is not complete equality in this world and that in this country, where there is more equality that anywhere else, there are still a lot of inequalities, you know how these things are. .

Time will pass and one day all of you will have the educational level, the level of knowledge of all sorts because you have been educated in this way, because your parents have contributed so much to your education as they educated themselves at the same time, because they learn too, , look at the advantages, see how important the role of parents in a revolution like this one is, but the Empire's barbarians, savages, mass murderers have come up with the slanderous accusation that we are going to take children away from their parents to send them to Russia and the Russians will send them back as tinned meat. Just look at how unscrupulous those morons are and how they take advantage of people's ignorance. Only incredible ignorance could make it possible for anyone to imagine that this might be true, and when they cooked up that lie those criminal monsters led approximately 14,000 families to send their children to the United States. Many families were separated for ever.

I'll tell you a story... because there are still liars who are just as bad or even worse but they've run into the Himalayas this time, although some of them don't know that. perhaps in the coming days I'll talk about some of these things that have to be talked about, and you will understand a lot because of the excellent education you have received...

They made that up, and it was just the opposite. The Revolution was calling parents every day, inviting them to primary, secondary and other kinds of schools. Education can't be conceived of without parents, that's where education begins and when you are parents you will be much better educated and your children, when they are parents, will be better educated than you because you will have educated them and it will then be something very different from what has existed throughout history because the hour has indeed arrived when the world has no option but to change or to cease to exist.

I am not talking about the world as geography, but about there being a human species. I say it being completely convinced of it. What great satisfaction and nourishment it gives us to think that we are educating the type of men and women who could indeed save humanity.

I mentioned the number of those who have food at school today; but there are still 5,272 students who still don't get snacks, this happens in about 19 isolated schools but by next year everyone will be included and they will be no one left out. And how much time did it take to do all of this? Two years. And how much time has gone by since that 9 September? Less than 3 years, it's not three years yet, there are still two months to go.

I should mention that all libraries were given collections of encyclopaedias, atlases, dictionaries; that is to say, their stock of books was replenished. I should say that we have some fantastic new printers and one whose actual status I don't know about the last one... (Alfonso tells Fidel that all the technical equipment is going to be installed in August)

How long will that take? (Fidel is told that the first print run should start in October).

And what is its production capacity Alfonso? (he tells Fidel it is 45 million books). And don't let's even talk about that because we are not publicists. Deeds rather than words, They is nothing more persistent and powerful than deeds. Deeds that are born of ideas and new deeds give birth to new ideas.

I must keep in mind that I am talking to young comrades, 14 year old adolescents or who are just finishing their adolescence, 14 and 15 years old they haven't experienced those things. But then they didn't experience the discovery of the Americas either or the history of the roman empire or of what we call Greek civilisation a long time ago and you know quite a bit about all that. They didn't live in the period of the wars of independence in Cuba they did not live in Martí's time and you know a lot about him. That is learning, that is studying, these are the fruits of education.

Not one of us would have been able to attempt anything if we had not had the privilege of studying. And how many? The overwhelming majority can't study and not even 10% of the citizens of this country were able to reach sixth grade. When the Revolution triumphed I read — I'm not too sure about the

accuracy of the statistics— that there were, according to a census or some to the investigation, about 400,000 sixth grade graduates.

For each sixth grade graduate back then, today there are four university graduates and one day there will be more people with university degrees in the sciences than there were sixth grade graduates in 1959.

This, Mr imperialists, is a revolution so don't go around being so stupid, open your eyes to what it is and what it is, is indestructible. (Applause)

Satisfactory development in the organisation of basic secondary education has been seen as has [improved] student discipline, the links created with the families through the home visits and the parents' school, which more 97% of families have attended.

An example of the discipline now existing in this level of education was how many of Havana's pioneers took part in the impressive 17 May march when the pioneers stood out because of their discipline and combativeness.

The new educational model and the notion of the general, all-round teacher has meant that in our schools, if all indications come true, not one class period is lost. Previously we didn't know how many were lost, if there were more lost periods than taught periods.

The main efficiency indicators, when compared with the two previous years have gone up: 995 of students attending classes — in the whole country— 99.98% of students staying at school (109 drop outs, 343 less than in the same time the previous year). Where, where are there figures like these? Could it be in those paradises of freedom that the barbarians have created? Could it be in those democracies where only money counts and the truth is never told? In those democracies where everything is bought or stolen, even the presidency of the republic and that little führer who now governs the United States did.

I used the words little führer I don't know how much they have taught you about the history of the Second World War, about fascism, Nazism and about a gentleman called Adolf Hitler, but if they haven't go to the library during these holidays and find out about him. Advice from an apprentice general, all-round teacher. (Laughter)

Look, look at the figures. Where? Go to Central America, go to all those countries. Where? How many made it to sixth grade, how many to ninth?

Her more than 98% make it to that level, there are only a few hundred who for one reason or another do not continue with or who end their schooling, for reasons such as early pregnancy, or some students who emigrate when their parents emigrate. Of course, they are not illiterate, that's impossible. Many people have gone over there; we should ask them how many illiterate Cubans have gone there. All of these children arrive with an amazing education, they know much more than their children because that educational system in the United States is a disaster at the primary and secondary level and the worst thing of all is that they do not teach them any values and some time these children kill each other on school premises because in that barbarous system everyone carries a gun like back in the days of the Wild west. Those people have not found out they have not emerged from the 18th century in many moral respects.

Now they wander through the world torturing people and depriving the Us people of their elemental rights, submitting them to all kinds of surveillance and all kinds of restrictions and one day the citizens of the United States will take it upon them to sweep these away, don't you forget it.

Alright, I should say a few more things, although not too many.

In just two years, as I pointed out, remarkable results have been achieved in discipline, behaviour, safety and quality of life of our adolescents in the school system where, what is more, all are included and those who can't be go to special schools which are right for their problems, they have not been forgotten. There are tens of thousands of children who go to special schools ,not a single one, not a single one has been forgotten and those who live in isolated places, well the social workers go to them —we now have 28,000 social workers in Cuba, you can find them almost more easily than a needle in a haystack.

Recently they drew up a complete list of the 40, 00 poorest households or those with most difficulties in the country and we are attending to them, we are providing them with help and from time to time a barbarian pops up, or a little disciple of the barbarian who stuffed their heads with some old lie and they say: Look here, you have provided this child with, whatever, a television and he is a prisoner's son". Look at the way some people still think, for if there is anyone who really needs this more than anyone it is this child who committed no crime but has the misfortune that for one reason or another his father fell into crime.

I should tell you that those, in the future , as education makes more progress, there will be less and less people going to prison.

It is very hard for me to imagine that any of these adolescents that we have before us here could become a criminal, after all the values that you, their teachers, their parents have taught them.

There might be a child, in some corner of the country who doesn't even have a bed, or a foam mattress. We find this out, believe it. I am very well aware of what we are learning and I am very well aware of what we are doing. This Revolution, which is socialist, and which is guided by the principle of giving to each according to his work, has not forgotten and cannot forget, or it wouldn't be the Revolution, nor would it deserve the name if it intended to provide for a handicapped person according to their work. No, that is why there are those who work and those who can work, to provide for those people who cannot. Everything has to be done for a child who isn't even a month old; this child has to be given everything.

The country was willing to do whatever was necessary for one little, we might almost say willing to die, we would not accept the idea of abandoning him. That is why you were given that broadsheet, The Truth is Invincible. That battle was won with truth, with morality and with consciousness. And it was won because our arguments won the heart and the sympathy of the US people, we will never forget that and we are very confident that one day, although today its oppresses, although today its plunders and although today it forces others to pay for genocidal wars, that same people will sweep all this rubbish away.

I was talking about some things that are not doing very well, the situation of our adolescents. I was saying that we have achieved remarkable results in many fields.

But I should add that we are still far from achieving all the academic results that we could and should achieve. That , there is no doubt, will be our most complex task, given the need for a total change in thousand year old concepts and habits in societies deeply divided between rich and poor, the super-privileged and the masses who suffer from the complete absence of equality and justice,, this task will need arduous tenacious work.

Factors which place obstacles in the way of this task, according to the opinions of various specialists: the need for teachers to be better trained to teach all subjects, not being yet completely at home with the software, shortcoming in the differential attention given to their 15 students, not giving sufficient guidance for the differential tasks depending on each students level of competence, they are teachers who do not watch the videoclasses as many times as is needed.

There is a need to continue to improve social work with their students and their families

You know better than anyone where the difficulties lie, the obstacles, the problems, sometimes even time. But there is absolutely no need to lose heart, they will be more and more teachers, with more and more training. Watch out! We shall see.

Yes, all points of view must be listened to and analysed, but, naturally on the basis of firm and tenacious commitment and work. We cannot free ourselves from work and efforts are made so much more decisively the more one loves the cause for which we struggle and the goals we seek.

The pioneer's opinions:

94.36% of pioneers think that the teachers want them to be better.

98.07% think that they provide an example for them.

90.20% think that they give good classes. —I'm talking about the whole country, secondary schools teachers.

87.79% think that they get attention when they need it.

87.12% think that their teachers let them state their opinions, listen to them and respect them. That seems to me to be satisfactory and what the teachers deserve.

Favourite subjects(in order) are: mathematics, number one, wonderful, Spanish, very good, history, good, computer classes, good, English, fifth place, but not only English other languages must be learned too, what happens is that it has become the universal language, one of the few good things left behind by English colonialism and this imperialism which is so close to us. Geography, six, OK, chemistry seven, no comment, that was almost the only subject that I couldn't learn because all that H₂O and those positive and negative ions was sort of hard for me. (Laughter) So I was a bad student.

Since we were talking about general, all-round teachers I have to confess that I was the general, all-round absentee. (Laughter) Don't think it was because I wasn't there, I was in the classroom from grade one on all through secondary school, the grades you are in and others, I had the five year secondary school certificate, one more that they added the year I started. I was there but I paid no attention to a single class, I was thinking about other things, and not always about girls, although it seems that some of the boys in this schools did, because it surprised me, it really did, there was a long list of outstanding graduates, girls, girls, girls (Laughter). I didn't see a single boy. They said, "There's one at the end". And look, men everywhere giving orders, holding responsibilities, directing and making decisions. And in Elian's school, I think that out of 25 there were about four or five who were given a diploma of excellence. But here I thought things were getting better, but no, they're going from bad to worse. (Laughter) I asked "and what did this boy do?" "They are very good" But they can't compete.

I should add that I was very pleased, because societies have been so unfair towards women, they have discriminated against them so much, they have stupidly and dimwittedly wasted women's abilities, and so we should be pleased at what we are seeing. I hope there are psychologists and experts analysing this. But well, I say; "There won't be a single man left giving orders.

What a pity that it wasn't like that in my time so I could have devoted myself to sports to studying what I didn't study and to filling the gaps which I have inherited from my habits of an inveterate autodidact. That was when I was going to secondary school and was shut in there in the classroom but my imagination flew all over the place, except to the teacher and the blackboard. There was no computer science nor were there any girls. Segregation was king in that school.

I remembered chemistry because it was the only subject that gave me trouble, that damn chemistry. That is why I don't want to say anything.

I really liked biology and I don't know why, I had no opportunity to study biology.

Physical education, that I studied a lot, there wasn't a hill around there that I didn't want to climb and no sport that I didn't want to play. (Laughter)

I liked physics, the last on the list, but this is not about what I did and didn't like but about the differences that can be seen in these students who don't even want to know about physics. (Laughter) But I liked it. I also studied it on my own, when exams arrive, of course, things are more intelligible.

Geometry, mathematic even I studied them, but I would have preferred to have had teachers like you. Ah! Then, doubtlessly, this trade to which I dedicated my life would have been much more useful.

Families' opinions. Look, listen to their opinions, the parents.

"81.70% of the parents think that their children's interest in their lesson is good and 15.54% think it is so-so. That's fine, so they (the parents) get more interested and demand more. But to demand one has to cooperate with the school and not just complain that the teacher this and the teacher that. I am pleased about this but, well, the percentage is high.

76.90% think that, generally speaking, their children's learning is good and 19.58% think it is so-so. I am talking about countrywide data, so don't think we're referring to parent sat this school.

Parents' thoughts about their children's moral qualities, also country wide.

When parents were surveyed they said these were the good qualities their children had: in favour of the Revolution, 96.42%, expressing solidarity, 94.56%; honest, 92.35%, respectful, 91.54% — I expect that this number will go up as the children learn the manners that we have seen here— responsible, 84.85%; disciplined 83.64%".

But consider something beautiful about the students' parents at this experimental school, who are from poor backgrounds, labourers, 65%, housewives or workers, or other, 20%; professionals, 15%. Observe, as well, small number of professional among the parents at this school, in this very poor part of the capital where there are a lot of social problems, with housing, with everything, perhaps it's one of the areas with the highest amount of problems. Look at the letter they sent, that they directed to the education department and to us.

Dear comrades,

The Parents' Council at the José Martí Experimental Basic Secondary School is sending this letter to ask that special recognition be given to all the workers, the teaching staff, the UJC leaders and the Party leaders and especially to the management council at the José Martí school for their work and for what they have achieved. The love, dedication, care, tenderness and bravery with which they take on their responsibility is impressive

"The students at this school, like at other schools in the municipality, have complex and very varied characteristics; nevertheless, they have accepted the challenge and have obtained a high level of discipline, academic achievement, class attendance and political training. Our children have been given more personalised attention which is really important at this age, which are also subject to change. All have put into practice a well known educational principle: the interdisciplinary relationship.

"All activities are carried out with a level of discipline that should be brought to your notice. There is excellent communication between parents and teachers. They deserve sincere recognition, our affection and respect. They are an example of struggle on how to face the biggest challenge, the one we have been meeting with pride for more than four decades; to give socialism historical continuity under the

empire's very nose.

This is but small homage to those who, leaving their own problems to one side, give of the best of themselves in the classroom.

Thank you for your work, we are indebted to you,

That's all, affectionate greetings.

Parents' Council

José Martí Experimental School (Prolonged applause)

We ask that this letter be read publicly", which is what I have just done and with great pleasure. That is an example too. It is a message to all parents in the country, to all teachers, to all children, it's sort of saying to you: much can be achieved. Which is why I was extremely pleased when I saw this letter.

It's coming up to the time when I have to finish. I still have a few things to say, but I will save them for next time, don't worry. We are going to see how much progress you make next year.

There were many matters to talk about, because we are making progress and we want to move ahead in senior secondary education at top speed. A lot of work is being done in programming and computer science. We are founding amazing universities like the institution I am always talking about and to which quite a few of these students will most certainly go, the University of Information Sciences. There's another one as well, the CUJAE has a wonderful faculty.

The professors who helped to organise this university came from the CUJAE.

There's also the Latin American School of medical Sciences which has almost 10,000 students.

Things are being done in the country which were not even imaginable even a few years ago, and human capital is what is being created. There is no substitute for this capital, No country can be ahead of us, no one can catch us now. We have a several lap advantage and now human capital is the main source of the country's resources and development.

A brilliant future lies ahead and we are working for that future. Nothing can defeat us. They can wipe our country off the map but they cannot wipe the Revolution off the face of the country. There will be not people that surrenders, no revolutionary who yields. We have not done so and we will never do so.

I dare to think that these students who we are graduating today will be much firmer, much more revolutionary, much better prepared, much braver, because of the values they defend, the ideas they raise like a banner, and they will be much better educated.

Take good note, restless and brutal lordling from the North, little führer, the empire can do nothing against this generation, nor with the first, nor the second nor the third.

Forget it, the US people will take it upon themselves to put an end to barbarity, and to the danger that you pose to humanity, and here you will have an ever more rock solid bastion of just ideas, Martí's ideas, Bolívar's ideas, Marx, Engel and Lenin's ideas. We are certainly not afraid to say so. (Applause) We are not afraid to speak of those who opened our eyes and showed us the path we have followed for decades, giving the world proof that there is no possible obstacle that can stop a just cause, a true revolution, no matter what they do.

Now they want to attack and threaten the Venezuelans. They don't learn, but they will learn.

Speech given in the Havana Convention Centre by the president of the Republic of Cuba, Fidel Castro

Published on FIDEL Soldier of Ideas (<http://www.fidelcastro.cu>)

Those who are here at this graduation ceremony will agree with us, will have the same hope that we place in you, the vanguard of hundreds of thousands who are today following this same path, are going through this same experience.

Today we can no longer talk of the José Martí experimental school but of the José Martí experimental national educational system. Let us today pay homage to him who spoke so often of education.
(Applause)

You perhaps do not yet see clearly enough but I can assure you that you have just written a page in the history books.

Patria o Muerte!

Venceremos!

(Ovation)

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